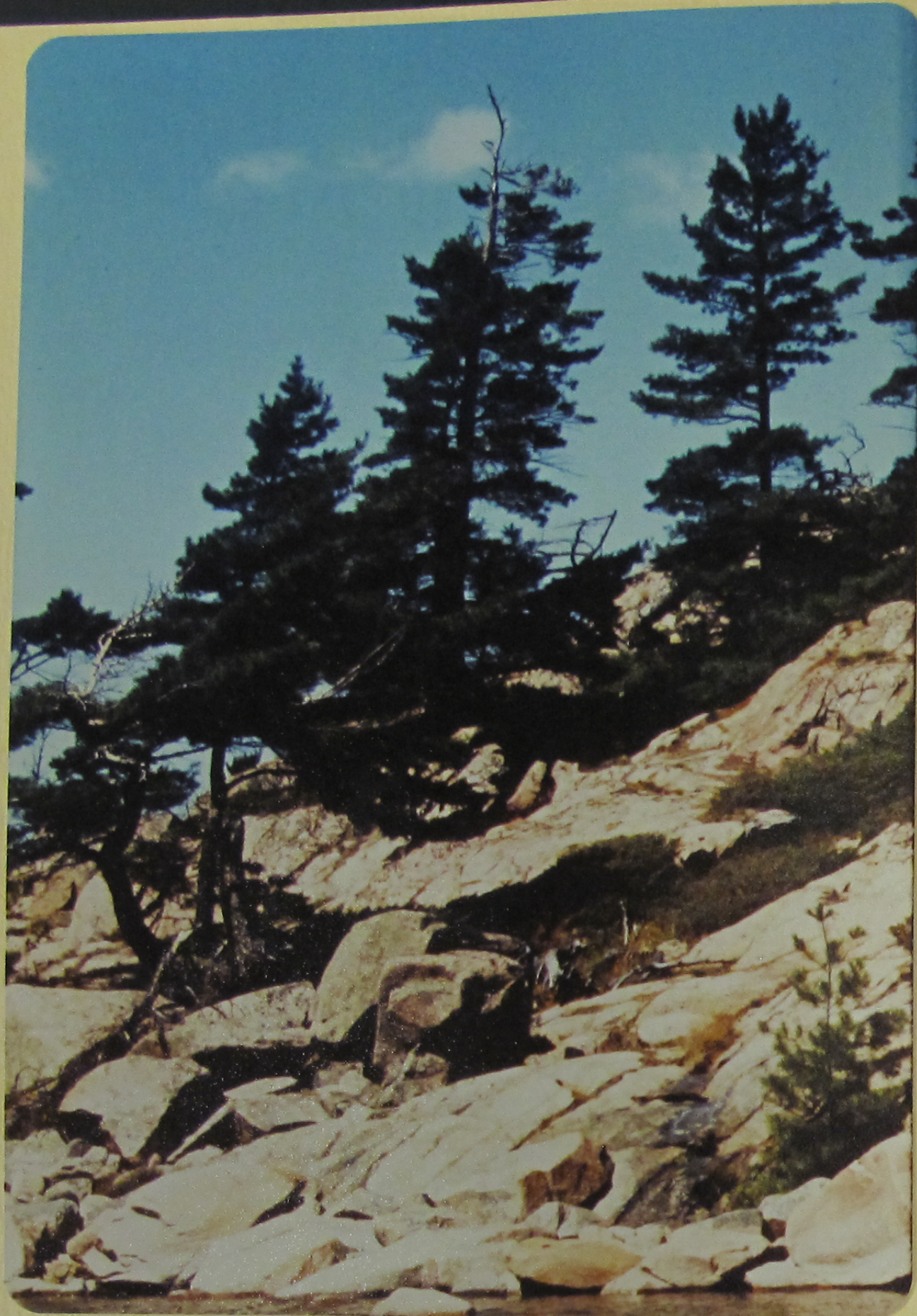


# Only Time Will Tell

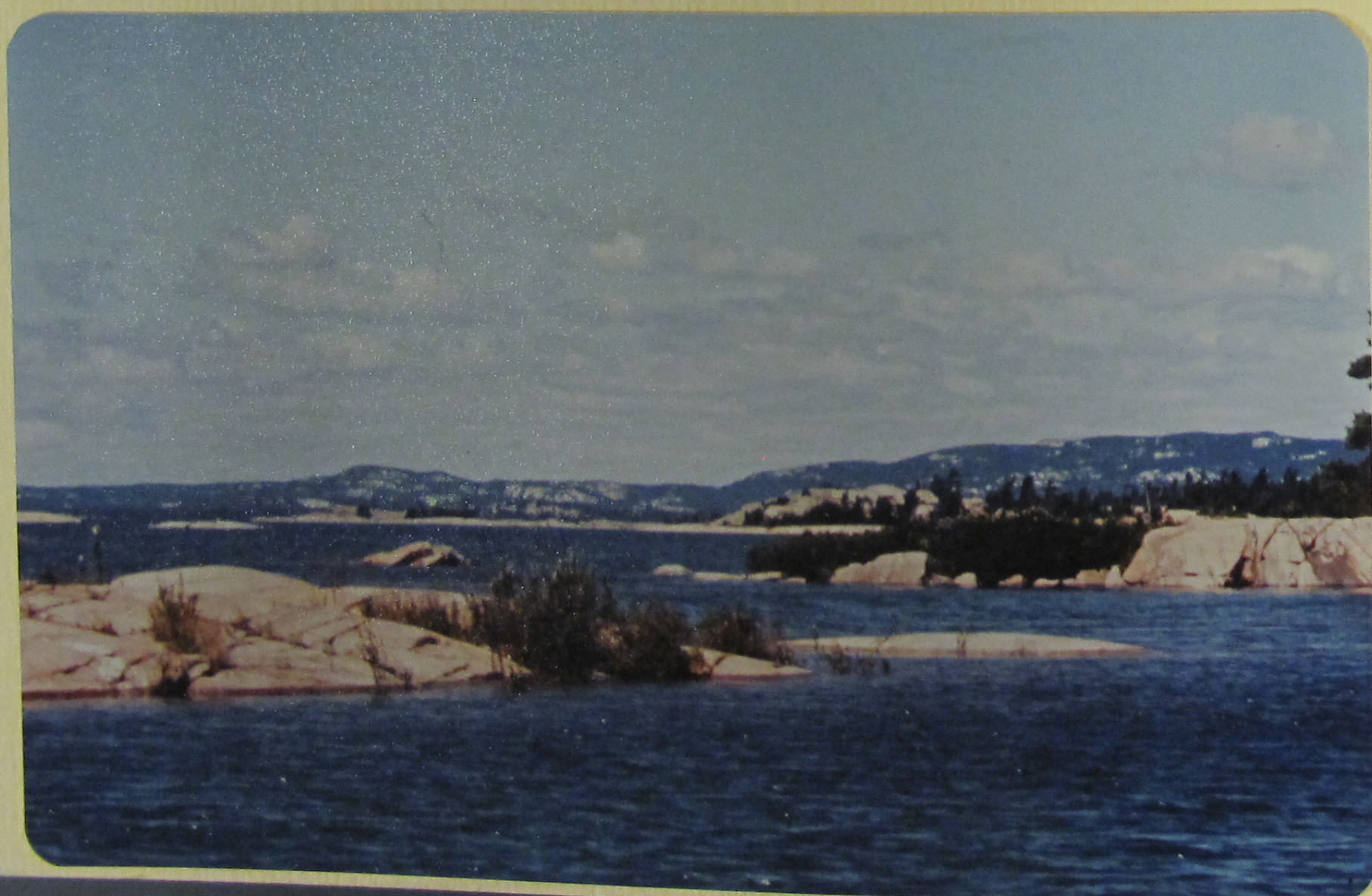
A Summer Experience in 1888  
of R.Tait McKenzie  
At Collins Inlet, Ontario.  
Canada

Elizabeth Pitt Barron





See page 4-5



## Only Time Will Tell

First Edition 1982



Dedicated to my brother  
Charles Bertram Pitt  
who also grew up  
spending many summers at  
Collins Inlet.



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see page 14 in "A strange Chronicle"  
- intended to add a chapter  
from here -



It was on receipt of a warm letter from  
his Uncle John Bertram, that prompted Tait  
to accept the offer of a summer experience,  
working for the Collins Inlet Lumber Company,  
located on the north shore of the Georgian Bay.

At the age of twenty-one, Tait felt it  
was an ideal opportunity, to not only enjoy the  
crisp fresh air, but help strengthen his slight  
build, and fill out the angular slim figure he  
had developed, and so thoroughly disliked.

This mission he finally accomplished.

However in the meantime, he found the  
north country extremely fascinating. It was  
unbelievable to find there were no trains  
within a radius of forty miles.



At that time, it was impossible to cut through the powerful snow-white granite rock of the nearby mountains, and only bush-wagon paths, provided a well marked overland trail, to lead the way to civilization.

Travelling in to Collins Inlet by boat, was a new and exciting experience for Tait. He knew that he was covering the same waterway used by Champlain, well over three hundred years ago. Champlain had used his great canoe manned by experienced voyageurs, to challenge the rugged shoreline he would follow.

This all crossed his mind, as he timidly boarded the small lumber tug, which his Uncle John had sent out to meet him. He was thankful to see it had a sturdy appearance, with a snub-nosed bow, which no doubt pushed a great number of heavily laden barges, or towed a countless number of schooners, to and from the mill. At a glance, all this was very comforting.

There should be no problem whatever.

They soon left the Killarney channel to enter the open Bay. Here the calmness ended. The white-caps riding the enormous waves like a surf board, raced for the shore, to batter the red rock formations piled high, as if to protect

the small lighthouse solidly planted above them.

From his elevated seat in the Captain's pilot house, Tait quickly noticed he could see no land to starboard, and that the skyline was scalloped with stormy wave formations along it's horizon.

On the port side, he surmised he was at a relatively safe distance from the rugged shore. The Captain was entirely unconcerned. The little tug seemed to enjoy plowing through the heavy seas. It was rolling to startling degrees as if dancing to a slow waltz, when it dipped rythmically from side to side. The funnel belching curls of smoke, defied the giant waves to roll it over.

As the mill channel drew nearer, Tait could see no obvious entrance. The waves were still high, and he watched a bit nervously when they splashed angrily on the treacherous shoals he knew were hidden beneath the the surface of the water. At times it was a frothy spray that identified their location.

He readily realized why the lumber schooners should use a guide to lead them into the protected waters of the channel, but for the present, it seemed a certainty that the tug would be dashed on top of the nearby rocks, as they skimmed by with only inches to spare.



If the Captain was simply showing off the dexterity of the small ship, or his skill in coping with it's response... it was a great performance, as well as a thrilling one.

Suddenly in the midst of it all, a miracle happened. The hidden channel yawned, and the mouth opened, quickly, and clearly, to provide calm and protected water from the running sea, now left far behind.

The winding channel was formed by the northern shoreline of the Phillip Edward Island, creating a magnificent waterway for sixteen miles, to then join the Georgian Bay at it's furthestmost point, and again battle the seas which pounded the shores so relentlessly. It could compare favourably with the great fiords of Norway. Here too, the steep high rocks seemed to be held in place by the most fragile pine trees, defying nature by growing tall and strong while sheltered by these huge rocky formations.

Wild life lived in abundance along this silent water route. The moose and deer came unmolested, to nibble on water lilies or drink the clear water as it grew dusk. This peace was only broken many decades later when the territory was invaded by reckless lumbermen,

inexperienced campers, and tourists, who were to destroy the northland, as a cloud of locusts might strip our prairies. It was a good thing that Tait did not live to see this tradgedy occur.

People seldom attempted to cross the rocky and treacherous inland of this big island, to reach the south shore on its opposite side. There, fishermen found it extremely rugged, but an excellent spot to anchor their pond-nets. In the early days, there were no specific regulations for them to follow, with the result that their boats would return to their destination, with their holds filled, and the gunwales only inches above water. This continued through many years, until the government finally decided it must end, as the catches were fast diminishing.

The south shore was known for battling the entire sweep of the strong Georgian Bay wind storms. The gap from the Bay to Lake Huron often added to the intensity. Small wonder the rocks were worn smooth, and known to take on weird and wonderful shapes

One in particular was most spectacular, and could be seen by everyone as the back of a huge pink elephant, it's head just peering



over the water to show deep set eyes, which on a calm day, was reflected on the water in round-eyed amazement, or when stormy, would have it's eyes washed out, to cry copiously with each incoming wave.

A number of two and three masted schooners, dared to sail through this dangerous passage, with or without a guide aboard. If familiar with the waterway, it was deep and clear in calm weather. It seemed to be the raging wind storms that created the havoc. Once in the shelter of the channel, sails proved to be useless, and only auxiliary engines, or an arrangement to be towed, could take them to their destination.

The only obstacle that these great ships encountered, was a narrow passageway in the channel, known as "the Narrows". It not only had a sharp turn, but much too shallow for most loaded boats to navigate. It was most fortunate that a deep water basin beside a high suitable rock, became "Novelty Dock", and ideal for turn-about. The vessels were held firmly in place by thick rope reaching out to the sturdy iron rings, long imbedded in the smooth rock, and have been in continuous use to this day.

A heavily laden barge was then towed out from the Inlet, and the cargo of lumber then transferred, to fill the deep dark holds of the waiting ship, so that she might soon set sail, and be on her way, to tackle the Georgian Bay, cross the gap to Lake Huron, and likely return to her Company berth in Sarnia, or elsewhere on the Great Lakes.

Some distance beyond the narrows, the channel widened, and they entered a lake-like body of water, ensconced with islands, and dense uninhabited timberland.

In early times fish were in abundance here. It had been a common practice to hook a thirty or forty pound muskalonge while trolling, and have to go ashore to land the fish safely, as it was well known as a great fighter.

The little tug now seemed to be racing along, like a fast horse headed for the barn. It was only a few minutes later, that the Captain suggested Tait might like to pull the whistle cord, which would notify the village that the tug was about to land. The invitation was given with a twinkle in his eyes, and a broad grin holding back a few chuckles. Tait soon discovered the reason for this unusual offer. The whistle cord was knotted tightly at the end, in order to grasp it firmly.



It shocked him to find it took every inch of muscle he thought he had well exercised, to pull this obstinate steam whistle, to give the three reasonably long blasts that were required.

The Captain also knew, it would not take long, while working at the mill, heaving lumber, plus the boarding house good meals, to gain the strength and vitality Tait was so anxious to obtain.

It was a smooth landing at the company dock. He could see it was made of stout hand hewn timbers, to hold any steamboat or schooner steadfastly in it's place.

The Captain gave Tait a firm handshake as he left the tug, saying that he would make a fine sailor, and could join his crew anytime. In later years, Tait did work aboard an ocean liner as a ship's Doctor, which proved the Captain was right afterall.

The mill manager was on hand to welcome Tait to the new job. He had known his Uncle John was now in Session at Ottawa, as he was the Parliament Member for Peterborough at this time, and might not be able to visit during his stay at the Inlet. He noticed the mill workers abbreviated the Collins Inlet, to a simple "Inlet", or else just called it "The Mill". Everyone knew of the

Collins Inlet Mill, as it had already been in use for a great many years.

Tait was escorted along the low road, far below the Dock Rock which towered above him. He was told that not only was it a fine view from the top, but that it grew the juiciest, largest and bluest blueberries in the area. This was at once stashed away in his mind for future reference. He didn't know that the berries also were best on the sheer ledges of rock, where no one could reach them.

The mill road was now covered with deep sawdust. Slab piles were stacked neatly on both sides. He found out, that they were used for firing the tug in order to supply the steam, used for not only towing, but the necessary trips over the Georgian Bay and along the North shore. These slabs were just a portion of the hundreds of feet of lumber, burned in the high metal burner, which was a landmark of the village. We might be shocked at this method to-day, but at that time, it was available to anyone wanting fuel in their houses, and avoided pollution or junk piles elsewhere, without much smoke or any sparks to destroy the little community. The air seemed to remain crisp and clear, as though filtered by the strong north winds.



Further along, it was noticed that a high rock stood on one side of the road, while on the other, a neat row of houses with their friendly porches, supplied accommodation for the families working at the mill. Here the neighbours often gathered to pass on the news of the day, chat or discuss the contents of the latest department store catalogue. Some had small back gardens for growing vegetables, but it was the potted plants inside and out, that added colour to their homes.

Finally, Tait was directly in front of the mill boarding house, where he would stay for the summer. It was a rambling two storey structure, which at one time had been painted white. One section reached forward to join a small front yard. There he stood in amazement, to see fuchsia plants blooming most profusely in large tomato cans, to completely fill the windows, and add a riot of dazzling colour to the whole place.

Inside the door, he found a small spotlessly clean sitting room with a few chairs for entertaining visitors. A magazine table was piled with old editions and aged newspapers, that could be read while waiting for the sound of the dinner bell.

Upstairs, he was given a most adequate bedroom, bright and comfortable. His ornate iron bed was painted white, and covered by an Indian patch-work quilt of rainbow colours.

Beside it stood a home made pinewood wash-stand, with a huge basin and water pitcher filled to the brim as usual. An added plus factor he was quick to notice before leaving, was the flowered china piece, kept discreetly under the bed.

A further tour was suggested, and he was introduced to the head of the boarding house, and his very capable wife. It was most difficult to tell which one was top person, as they shared their duties in well organized fashion. Yet, you could soon tell the kitchen domain was her department. An exciting aroma of fresh bread oozed from the oven of the cast iron stove. It was colossal! No doubt it was the fire-eating monster that consumed the lengthy wood-pile he had seen outside.

Tait was also intrigued by the mammoth icehouse, where nothing but deep sawdust could be seen on the inside. It took a lot of digging and heaps of chopping to get the clear ice the size you wanted. A wheelbarrow and ice tongs were used to transport it to the icebox in the cold room beyond the kitchen.

He could tell the cook loved her job. She got plenty of help in making her home made ice-cream, and the samples given for turning the crank, were certainly worth the effort. He was told her blueberry pie, with the fresh fish available from



nearby, kept mill-hands happy and eager to race for the dinner table at the sound of the bell.

The dining room was filled with long tables, with their benches fitting each side of them. While there was little conversation, there was plenty of enthusiasm, and the tables almost groaned with the weight of the plentiful food. Plates were well filled, only to be replenished shortly, with unlimited resources. While the vegetables were perhaps a bit monotonous, they were overshadowed by the variety of delicious pies and cakes served with their pannikin of tea. The pannikin was most versatile. It could be used as a cup without a handle, a soup bowl, or a fruit nappy, all because of its sloping sides and flat bottom, and was usually made of granite or tin. These sumptuous meals were available to guests for twenty-five cents. Needless to say, some of these tickets are still on display in the Indian Museum at Manitowaning, Manitoulin Island, as a relic of the distant past from the old lumber Mill at Collins Inlet where a great many Indians worked for a great many years. They came mainly from Wikwemikong or Cape Croker.

From the outside porch of the boarding house, the men could lean back in their chairs, light their pipes... often made of clay, or draw

out their familiar plug of chewing tobacco with the tin heart on it, then use their penknife to shave off a few curls, have a practice chew and be ready for the competition to score the most hits into the high necked spittoon.

Others were lulled to snooze from the sound of continuous running water in the flume, as it rushed by on its way to the great paddle wheel of the mill closeby, and supply the power required to cut thirteen million feet of lumber during the season.

The logs took a different route to the mill. First they were floated down the river, to the pond on the outskirts of the village, then fed through an Upper Dam, and shot over the Lower Dam to rest in the mill pond below until they were selected for cutting.

The chain hand-up worker stood by with his peavy in hand, always alert to find a log for its hungry jaws, and send it on its way to be hoisted into the mill by the donkey engine, and passed on to the sawyer who knew he had one of the most deft and important jobs in the mill. He also could ride the carrier, which required great care and skill, to have the saws perform as he directed for specific qualifications.





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